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SUBJECT: INDIA DETAINS SUSPICIOUS DPRK VESSEL FOR INVESTIGATION

¶1. (SBU) The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) confirmed August 8 that the Indian Coast Guard intercepted the DPRK-flagged merchant vessel MUSAN and detained its 39 crew members after the vessel unexpectedly dropped anchor off Hut Bay at Little Andaman Island August 5, failed to respond to attempts to hail it, and then evaded a Coast Guard patrol vessel for six hours in the early hours of August 6. The Coast Guard vessel fired a warning shot to force the MUSAN to comply with its order to sail to Port Blair. As of August 10, the vessel and its crew were in Coast Guard custody in Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, while under investigation by Indian security agencies. The Indian Government dispatched a special team of officials from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Army intelligence, including translators, to assist with the investigation.

¶2. (SBU) Navy Chief Sureesh Mehta reportedly told media August 9 that the vessel had "no business" being at the location where it anchored, but that the preliminary investigation had shown that it was carrying "genuine merchandise." According to media reports, the ship set sail from a port in Thailand on July 27 with a cargo of 16,000 tons of sugar. According to Coast Guard contacts, the crew claimed the vessel was carrying sugar bound for Iraq, but changed course when it received new instructions to offload instead in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. Media reported August 9 that the ship's captain, Yun Jonge Sun, claimed a mechanical problem led to its illegal entry of India's territorial waters.

¶3. (U) The Times of India August 9 portrayed the incident as a failure of India's coastal defense and "the most sensational security breach since the Mumbai attacks". A front page article claimed that the North Korean vessel went unnoticed for two days after it dropped anchor. A passenger on a ferry reportedly spotted the vessel in an isolated stretch of sea and alerted the ferry captain, who informed the harbor master, who tipped off the Indian Coast Guard and the Navy. The article reported that investigators found that the ship had made several voyages between North Korea and China without maintaining proper records, as well making an unscheduled stop in Singapore, though the crew's passports were not stamped there.

¶4. (SBU) Post will continue to seek further details.

Regardless of the manner in which the vessel's presence came

to light and the outcome of the on-going investigation, Post views India's decisive action as a positive sign of its intention to enforce UNSCR 1874 and its continuing cooperation on counter-proliferation.

ROEMER